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LETTER

TO THE

REV. HUGH BLAIR, D.D.

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF EDINBURGH,

ON THE

IMPROVEMENT OF PSALMODY

IN

Scotland.

(BY JAMES BEATTIE, LL.D.

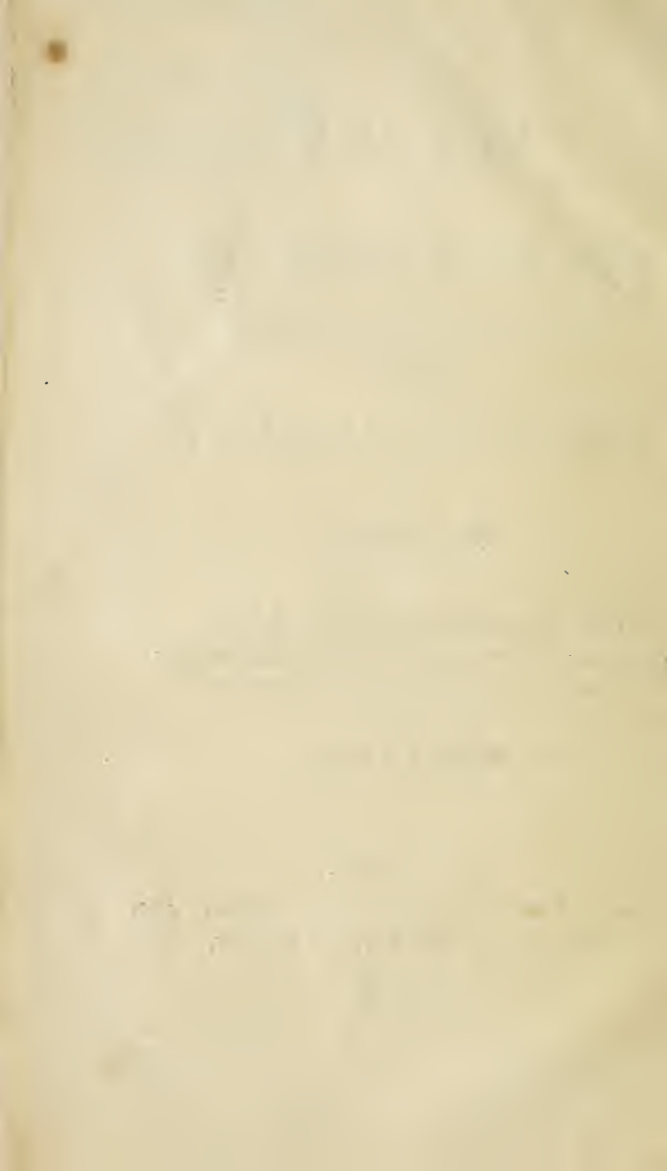
LATE PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND LOGIC IN
THE MARISCHAL COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY
OF ABERDEEN.)

MDCCCLXXVIII.

EDINBURGH:

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J. STEVENSON, 87, PRINCES STREET.

MDCCCXXIX.



A

LETTER, &c.

REVEREND SIR,

THE message you lately sent me, by my friend Mr Cameron, has determined me to give you my thoughts at some length upon the subject of it. I am happy in the compliments you pay me, though conscious that they are very far beyond any thing I can pretend to : for I consider them as a proof, that I have no inconsiderable share in your esteem ; and they encourage me to hope, that you will not be displeased to see a more distinct account of a plan, which you already know in part, and have done me the honour to approve.

About fifteen years ago, I was desired by a Friend, who, like you, Sir, is pleased to think of me more favourably than I deserve, to attempt a new translation of the Psalms into English verse. But, young as I was, I had the prudence to decline that undertaking, from a persuasion, that I was by no means equal to it. The improvement of our Psalmody had, however, been in my mind before that time, and has often been in it since, as a thing neither unnecessary nor impracticable. I wish it were in my power to

promote so good a work. If my health were such as it once was, I should think it my duty to comply with your wishes in this particular; especially as you are pleased to think, that by so doing I might be serviceable to the Church. Musick has great power over all the amiable affections of our nature; but seems to be peculiarly suited to the purposes of devotion. For pious sentiments, enforced by apposite harmony, have, to a serious mind, a charm inexpressible, and seldom fail to convey some good emotions to every tender heart. Indeed, I am inclined to think, that the singing of psalms, if properly conducted, would not only be a most delightful, and consequently a most improving exercise, to all devout persons, but would also recommend the solemn offices of religion even to those who now affect to undervalue them. As long as we consist of a body and a soul, so united as mutually to affect each other with health or disease, pain or pleasure, so long will the teacher of mankind find it necessary to influence the passions, as well as to inform the judgment, of his hearers, and to appeal to their senses as well as to their understanding.

But while I speak of the improvement of our Psalmody, as equally desirable and practicable, I do not mean to draw your attention to myself, as the person who is fit to undertake it. Some private circumstances, whereof, Sir, you are not ignorant, forbid me to entertain any other hope in regard to this matter, than that of suggesting a hint or two, which may be of use to those, who have equal zeal and more ability.

They, who would reform our Psalmody, must attend to two things: first, the WORDS; and, secondly, the MUSICK. What I have now to propose, regards the former chiefly; but I shall make a few remarks on the latter, before I conclude.

Whether the Psalms of the Old Testament only are to be sung in publick, is a question, upon which I need not expatiate. As both Testaments are equally sacred, and as prayers of human composition are used in churches, I see no reason for confining ourselves in our church service to the Psalms of David; or for refusing to admit, into that part of worship, those passages of the New Testament which are fit to be set to musick, or even such pious songs of modern date, as those published by Addison in the Spectator. But if a collection of this kind is to be made, 'it ought in my humble opinion to be done by the General Assembly of the Church; and Clergymen should not be permitted to use in the public Psalmody any odes or poems which are not warranted by that authority.

On this point, however, Christians may differ. But they are, I think, unanimously of opinion, that the Psalms of the Old Testament are well adapted to the church-service. They were originally intended to be accompanied with musick, and sung in the solemn assemblies of God's people: they breathe the most exalted strains of morality and devotion: the style throughout, though various, is equally intelligible and sublime: they contain a rich fund of topicks suited to religious meditation: and, as they allude to many vicissitudes of human affairs, and many states and

passions of the human soul, and some of them to the most important events of the Gospel-History, there are few circumstances in the Christian life, to which they will not in oné respect or other be found applicable. All Christian Churches have accordingly introduced these Divine Songs into their publick worship ; and many versions and paraphrases of them have appeared, suited to the taste of different ages and nations.

But I am not certain, that they have been improved by being versified. There is, in our prose translation of the Psalms, and other poetical parts of Scripture, a simple majesty, which it is impossible for the best versifier upon earth, not to violate, when he frames them to modern numbers. Nay, I am in doubt whether Church-musick would not have more energy, if we were to sing our psalms in prose, according to that form of Recitative, which in England is called *Chanting*. However, being no friend to innovation, I willingly submit this opinion to the authority of the Church, and to the general voice of the people. And this I must allow, in favour of Rhime and Metre, that they render the Psalms more agreeable to the popular taste ; that they assist memory ; and that, by their means, Church-musick is made more simple, and more easily attainable by the vulgar, than it would be, if the prose translation were to be sung in the Chanting Recitative.

It is therefore right, perhaps, that the Psalms should be translated into verse. But the extreme difficulty of this will be apparent to every one, who makes

the trial, and wishes to preserve the simplicity of the original pure from modern refinement, unnecessary paraphrase, and unwarrantable circumlocution ; and, at the same time, to give that smoothness to the measure, and exactness to the rhimes, which the publick ear now requires, and that elegant plainness to the expression, which, in a work intended to be understood by all, and to please all, is now indispensable. This at least is certain, that no metrical version of these Divine Songs, that has yet appeared in English, is altogether such as it ought to be. One is too rude, another too refined ; one is harsh by being too literal, and another languid by partaking too much of the nature of paraphrase. So that a new and a better version has long been considered by every person of piety and taste as a most desirable improvement. I shall, first, say something of the several versions in metre, that I am acquainted with ; and shall then take the liberty to propose a plan for a better.

That by Sternhold and Hopkins is the oldest I have seen in our language. Its rudeness has become even proverbial. The verse is very incorrect, the sense not always clear, and the expression sometimes exceedingly vulgar. And yet, even in this version, there are a few stanzas, particularly in the eighteenth, and one hundred and third psalm, which no true poet would undertake to improve. The late editions of it are different from the first, but the amendments are not always for the better. For example, in the old copies of the eighteenth psalm, we have the following lines :—

'The Lord descended from above,
 And bow'd the heavens high,
 And underneath his feet he cast
 The darkness of the sky :
 On seraph and on cherubim
 Full royally he rode,
 And on the wings of all the winds
 Came flying all abroad.

These words are wonderfully well-chosen, and happily arranged ; and there is a spirit in the harmony which has been admired by the best judges. But the reformers of Sternhold have hurt both the sound and the sense, by changing the latter part of the first couplet thus, " And bow'd the heavens *most high* ;" and by substituting "*mighty winds*" instead of "*all the winds*," in the last couplet. The first amendment not only injures the sense, by applying to a part of the inanimate creation an epithet which the Scripture applies to the Creator : but also encumbers the harmony ; for though " heaven" be now pronounced as one syllable, it formerly consisted of two ; and no good ear is offended with the old pronunciation in an old poem. The second amendment, in order to make room for an unnecessary word, destroys a sublime image, that of the Deity descending from all parts of the universe at once ; which well typifies the Divine Omnipresence, and is indeed one of the most magnificent ideas to be met with in poetry.

Of the version that comes next in the order of time, I never saw but one copy ; which is a small folio printed at London in 1636, with this title, " The Psalms of King David translated by King James." The

work does honour to this learned Monarch. It is not free from the northern idiom ; but the style seems to me to be superiour to that of every other Scotch writer of that age, Hawthornden excepted. There are in it many good stanzas, most of which have been adopted by the compilers of the version now authorized in Scotland, whereof this of King James is indeed the ground-work. Nay, those compilers have not always equalled the royal versifier, where they intended, no doubt, to excel him. I shall give one example. The third verse of the fiftieth psalm stands in our version thus :—

Our God shall come, and shall no more
Be silent, but speak out ;
Before him fire shall waste, great storms
Shall compass him about.

James has the advantage, both in the arrangement of the words, and in the harmony :—

Our God shall come, and shall not then
Keep silence any more ;
A fire before him shall consume,
Great storms about him roar.*

The next English version of the Psalms in metre, is that which is now used by all the Presbyterian congregations in Scotland. And this, notwithstanding its many imperfections, I cannot help thinking the best. The numbers, it is true, are often harsh and incorrect ; there are frequent obscurities, and some ambiguities in the style ; the Scotch idiom occurs in several places ; and the old Scotch pronunciation is

* Better thus : *And storms around him roar.*

sometimes necessary to make out the rhyme.* Yet in this version there is a manly, though severe, simplicity, without any affected refinement; and there are many passages so beautiful, as to stand in need of no emendation.

Milton translated some of the psalms into that sort of verse which is used in the church-service. These are commonly overlooked as unworthy of so great a man: but they deserve attention, and that on two accounts. First, because they show, that in Milton's judgment a versified psalm ought to be simple in the style, and as literal as possible; a circumstance which does honour to our Scotch version: and, secondly, because they contain some very good lines. The following image is worthy of the author of *Paradise Lost*:

As when an aged wood takes fire,
Which on a sudden strays;
The greedy flame runs higher and higher,
Till all the mountains blaze. Ps. lxxxiii.

And the verse that mentions Baca's vale is more intelligible as well as more musical in Milton, than in the other translations:

They pass through Baca's thirsty vale,
That dry and barren ground,
As through a fruitful watery dale,
Where springs and showers abound. Ps. lxxxiv.

About the end of the last century, Dr Brady and Mr Tate published a new version of the Psalms, which was well received, but has not been universally adopt-

* As when *Rejoice* is made the rhyme to *Goes*; and *Approven* to *own*. Psal. xix. and cv.

ed, either in England, or by the English congregations in Scotland. There is an air of modern refinement in the style, which with some readers will pass for elegance; and the general run of the verse is smoother and more correct than in the old versions. Where plain moral sentiments are to be expressed, Tate and Brady succeed well enough. But they often sink into the flatness of prose; and often affect familiar phrases, antitheses, and other conceits that prevailed among the middling poets of their time. However, their work has considerable merit, and will be found of great use, if the plan I am going to propose shall ever be put in execution. They are least successful in the sublimer parts of the sacred poetry; for which they seem not to have had any true taste, and which they frequently debase by incongruous ornaments, quaint expressions, mean allusions, and insignificant epithets. In order to suggest a caution to future translators, and that I may not be thought to speak rashly, I shall take the freedom to justify this censure by a few examples.

In the ninety-eighth psalm, the inspired Author, by a bold but sublime personification, says, "Let the floods clap their hands, and let the hills be joyful together before the Lord." Tate and Brady expunge the noble figure, and put something in its stead, which, if it is not nonsense, is at least very bad sense:

With joy let rivulets swell to streams,
To spreading torrents they, &c.

Where it is supposed to be an effect of joy to increase

the magnitude of the joyful being. Is this natural? Does joy make a man taller or larger? How much better our Scotch version!

Let floods clap hands, and let the hills
Together joy declare, &c.

In the ninety-seventh psalm, we have this text, "The Lord cometh to judge the earth." Tate and Brady, instead of imitating the simple energy of the psalmist, endeavour to heighten the idea into a description; but the circumstances they make choice of are utterly inadequate; and lead the reader's thoughts to an English Judge, or Scotch Lord of Justiciary, setting out with his attendants, to hold the assizes in different parts of the country.

The Lord's approach they celebrate,
Who now sets out with awful state,
His circuit through the earth to take, &c.

"The heavens declare the glory of God," says David. Our authors, by an unseasonable antithesis not well expressed, introduce obscurity into this plain and emphatical aphorism:

The heavens declare thy glory, Lord,
Which that alone can fill.

In that most beautiful hymn upon the creation, the 104th psalm, the Divine Poet says, speaking of the streams in the mountains, "They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild asses quench their thirst." Our authors not only run into needless paraphrase, but seem even to hint at the natural stupidity of the ass, which is a very remote consideration, and what probably was never once thought of in Judea.

The field's tame beasts are thither led,
 Weary with labour, faint with drought ;
 And asses on wild mountains bred
Have sense to find these currents out.

The whole psalm in this version is full of these unnatural additions.

Nor *proudest mountains* dared as yet
 To lift above the waves their head.

The Psalmist says only, " The waters stood above the
 " mountains."

The clouds his chariots are, and storms
 The *swift-wing'd steeds* with which he flies.

The rudeness of Sternhold is more tolerable than these flourishes; which are most unseemly in a psalm, and hardly allowable in any serious composition. Unmeaning epithets occur in almost every page, especially where our authors give eight syllables to each line.

Let the *shrill* trumpet's *warlike* voice, &c.
 And *gentle* psaltery's *silver* sound. cl.
 The chariot of the King of kings,
 Which *active* troops of angels drew,
 On a strong tempest's *rapid* wings,
 With *most amazing* swiftness flew. xviii.

It is no doubt necessary, in versifying the psalms, to introduce, for the sake of the metre, some epithets, and other ornamental additions, not warranted by the original. This inconvenience unavoidably attends that mode of translation. Pope himself and Dryden, even in the best parts of their versions, are obliged to sacrifice a little of the old sense, and a great deal of the old simplicity, to our modern rhymes and measures.

But a translator of taste will be careful on these occasions to adapt himself to that turn of invention and phraseology, which characterises the author; and will be particularly on his guard against witticism and finical conceits, which are so common in modern poetry, and so repugnant to the genius of the antient.

I have seen five other translations of the Psalms in verse, that were printed in England during the last century; by Joshua Squire, Luke Milbourn, Daniel Burgess, George Wither, and Richard Goodridge; but I did not find any thing in them worthy of further notice. Two were published a few years ago, one by Mr Smart, the other by Mr Merrick. I have not seen these; but, from what I know of the authors, I am satisfied, that they well deserve the public attention.

The learned and ingenious Dr Watts translated the psalms into verse: adapting the sentiments to the language and doctrines of the New Testament. His imagination, as a poet, was not brilliant; and his numbers are rather smooth than harmonious; but his verse is easy, and his expression clear and simple. I have great respect for the memory of that good man and excellent writer, as well as for the judgment of many of those who approve his translation. But I freely own, that it is not to my taste, though I cannot here give my reasons. If we mean to use the Psalms of David in our worship, I humbly think, that we should take them as they are: without supposing, either that they are not so good as they ought to be, or that it is in *our* power to make them better. I allow indeed, that New-Testament hymns have at least

an equal claim to our veneration ; but I would not make a parody of the Scripture, by expressing the sentiments of the one Testament in the words of the other. However, I will not enter into the controversy, which would lead me too far from my present purpose. I shall only remark, that some of Dr Watts's psalms are both elegant and *literal*, and may be of great use to the person who undertakes to execute the following plan.

The point in view is, to compose a translation in verse of the Psalms, that shall be "more plain, smooth, "and agreeable to the text than any heretofore ;" so simple as to be understood by all ; so elegant as to give no reasonable offence to any ; as literal as the present state of the English tongue and the laws of English versification will permit ; and adapted to the tunes usually sung in our churches. To make it altogether new, is, in my opinion, not necessary, and would be very difficult. It should, I think, be compiled from the best passages of former translations ; with such amendments of the style and measure, as may be requisite to give the whole an appearance of uniformity. A strict uniformity should not be attempted. The original psalms themselves are by different authors, and differ greatly in the style : and the version now sung in Scotland is itself a compilation ; many passages being taken from King James, a few from Hopkins and Sternhold, and some no doubt from other authors whom I have not seen.

That our church tunes should be simple, and of easy acquisition, will be allowed by those who consider the

circumstances of the common people of Scotland ; few of whom have the means of making great proficiency in musick. And therefore in the proposed work I would not affect many varieties of measure. Some of those that occur in the psalms now used have long been obsolete, and deserve not a revival. Such are our *second versions* (as we call them) of the 124th, 136th, and 143d psalms : in the two last of which, the shortness of the verse occasions so quick a return of the rhimes, as must appear almost ludicrous to a modern reader. The anapestick rhythm of Sternhold's 104th psalm, which has been revived by Tate and Brady in their 149th, may also be omitted ; as having nothing to recommend it but a lively tune ; for the measure, in the present improved state of English numbers, has not dignity enough for a psalm. The only measures I would recommend are, first, and chiefly, our common Iambick Lyrick measure, formerly comprehending two lines of seven feet each, which are now, for the convenience of printers who use a narrow page, broken into four lines, whereof the first and the third consists of eight syllables or four feet, and the second and the fourth of six syllables or three feet : and, secondly, that which is vulgarly called Long Measure, consisting of four lines rhyming alternately or in couplets ; each of which lines comprehends four Iambick feet, or a short and a long syllable four times repeated. The first psalm and most of the other psalms are examples of the former ; and the second version of the hundredth psalm is an example of the latter. There is another stanza, which I would not

wholly exclude, and which is used in our first version of the twenty-fifth psalm, consisting of four lines, whereof the first, second, and fourth are of six syllables each, and the third of eight. But the first of these measures is the best of the three, and (if I mistake not) the most popular, as well as the most convenient: and I beg leave to add, that in a psalm it has the best effect, and is withal most easy in the composition, when only the second and fourth lines rhyme together. Sternhold and Hopkins, and Tate and Brady, sometimes make the rhimes of this stanza alternate; but it is a troublesome and unprofitable nicety; for they are often put to hard shifts, and obliged to take unwarrantable freedoms with the sense, in order to make it out.

I have been told, that the people called Methodists, and some other sectaries, use many varieties of measure in their psalms, and sing some of them to the airs of common songs; assigning this whimsical reason, that it is pity, the devil should have all our good musick. Pity it is indeed, if it be so: but I am not one of those, who think there is any thing diabolical, or even blameable, in a song expressive of love, chearfulness, valour, or any other virtuous or innocent affection. Be that however as it will, I mean only to observe here, that as we ought not to give our good musick to the devil, so neither should we receive our religious musick from him. The sanctuary cannot be adorned by that which is already black with the pollutions of hell. But, to leave this allegorical cant, I am seriously of opinion, that psalm-tunes only should

be used in singing psalms, and that nothing but psalms or hymns should be sung to psalm tunes. For, as I would not make the church a place for dancing, or card-tables, or even for the ordinary business of commerce or of agriculture; so neither would I, without necessity, perform the church-service in a ball-room, in the market-place, or in a barn. They, who fancy themselves perfect, or who have been accustomed to attend to outward things only, without minding what passes inwardly in the human imagination, may indeed urge, that to the pure all things are pure, and that, if the heart be right, there can be no harm in places, or in any other external circumstance. But I know not in what part of this world we have any chance to meet with a perfect man; all the human creatures I have seen being subject to very powerful impressions from without, and liable to have their thoughts rectified and composed by one set of external objects, or discomposed and perverted by another. And therefore, it much concerns us, when we wish to have the command of our thoughts, to keep aloof from every thing that may tend to make them unruly. The expression of musick is so equivocal, that a tune can hardly be said to have any determinate meaning, till words are set to it: and if we have been long accustomed to hear certain words accompanied with a certain tune, we shall never perhaps be able, if we have a musical ear, to separate them, so as not to be put in mind of the former on hearing the latter. Let our common church-tunes, therefore, some of which are excellent in their kind, be still used in publick worship; and to them

only let the measures of our psalms be adapted. I have no objection to anthems; and there is reason to think, that many of Marcello's Psalms, and of Handel's sacred songs and choruses, might be performed in churches with the happiest effect: but these are sorts of composition quite different from what I now speak of; and as they cannot be sung with any degree of propriety, except by those who have been well instructed in musick, we are not to suppose them within the reach of the common people, or of ordinary congregations.

Of the proposed version, that which is now authorized in Scotland should, in my judgment, be the groundwork; its plan being better than that of any other I have seen, and the verse in many parts unexceptionable, though perhaps there are not in the whole book seven stanzas in succession, to which amendment may not be necessary. Where any passage is to be corrected, the compiler will consult the other versions, and freely take from them what may suit his purpose; or, if none of them should be to his mind, will interweave lines or phrases of his own; taking care to make the general colour of the style nearly uniform, to avoid incorrectness of rhyme and measure, and to imitate as much as possible the brevity, plainness, and sublimity of the original. I shall in a few paragraphs hint at some of those general imperfections of the present version, that seem to require amendment; after solemnly declaring, that I do so, not from any pleasure which I take in finding fault, but from a sincere desire of seeing a better version, that shall be superiour

to the captiousness of criticism, and to the sneer of the scorner.

Words or idioms peculiar to Scotland, or not warranted by good English authors, ought to be expunged, and classical expressions put in their place. A few improprieties of this sort occur ; but it is surprising that there are not more : as *approven* for *approved*, Ps. 105 ; *greed* for *covetousness*, Ps. 119 ; *the swallow hath purchased a nest*, Ps. 84 ; *I'll (I will) not want, for I shall*, Ps. 23 ; *temp'd* for *tempted*, Ps. 95 ; *riggs* for *ridges*, Ps. 65 ; *kythest* for *appearest*, Ps. 18 ; *sith* and *alongst*, for *since* and *along*, which last are obsolete English. The knowledge of the English tongue gains ground in Scotland every day ; and it is to be hoped, that in a few years a Scoticism will be as offensive to our ear as a broad Scotch word. In all solemn and elegant writing therefore, it ought as carefully to be avoided.

All licences, in regard to rhyme and measure, are to be removed, which in the present state of English numbers would not be tolerated in serious poetry ; such as making two syllables of *enemies*, and three of *testimonies* ; such as *approven* rhyming to *own*, *re-joice* to *goes* ; *distresses* to *faces*, *encompasseth* to *delivereth*, *consider* to *deliver*, *remember* to *for ever* ; and all double or treble rhimes in general, as *conversation—salvation* ; and all such fetches for a rhyme, as

Those that are anti-ents. Ps. cxix.

All thy command-e-ments. Ibid.

Of our salvati-on. Ps. xcv.

Commandement occurs in Sternhold, and several times

in our version. It is the French form of the word, and was once no doubt in general use among us, for I have heard it in the conversation of old people ; but it is now entirely obsolete. A rhyme in itself is no doubt a very insignificant thing ; but in poetry the ear must be gratified : and the publick taste in regard to rhimes and measures is now become so delicate, that every inaccuracy of this kind gives offence, and is taken for a proof of a bad ear, of negligence, or of want of skill in language. Horace severely blames the dramatic poets of his time for their licentious numbers ; and yet that nicety of versification is never required in the drama, which one expects to find in a Lyrick ode.

Ambiguities of phrase are faults of greater magnitude. These are not unfrequent in our version. One occurs in the first verse of the 137th Psalm :—

By Babel's streams we sat and wept,
When Zion we thought on ;
In midst thereof we hang'd our harps
The willow-trees upon.

The words *in midst thereof* occasion no ambiguity as they stand in the prose translation ; but, in the stanza, one cannot readily discover their meaning. They may be referred to *Zion*, or to *the streams* ; but do not clearly show what the Psalmist intended, namely, that the willow-trees grew in the midst of Babylon. This, however, being a circumstance not material to us, may perhaps be omitted.

By Babylonian streams afar
We sat and wept forlorn,

When Zion we thought on ; our harps
On willow-boughs were born.

Or if this be, as I think it is, rather too elaborate,
what if we should read it thus ;

By Babylonian streams afar,
While Zion we thought on,
We sat and wept ; our harps were hung
The willow-trees upon ?

The rhyme is somewhat faulty ; but it is pardonable.
Tate and Brady's paraphrase of this verse is remarkably injudicious. Sternhold and Hopkins come very near burlesque.

Some passages that seem to require the utmost possible brevity, are expressed by our versifiers with unnecessary diffusion. This is not the only fault observable in the following stanza :—

A man was famous, *and was had*
In estimation,
According as he lifted up
His ax thick trees upon.

The first line of the first psalm is perhaps more verbose than it should be ; and an attentive reader will find many others of the same character.

There are also a few phrases in our psalms in metre, which from an improper choice of words approach to the Ludicrous. The compiler of the new version will be careful to correct these. I shall not give a specimen ; nor is it necessary.

Passages that are so obscure, as not to be intelligible without a commentary, ought not to appear in a popular version. Of these there are too many in the

work before us. I shall only mention the verse that relates to Baca's vale, Psal. 84, the fourth verse of the 104th psalm, and the greater part of the eighty-seventh. A translator's first duty is to make himself master of his author's meaning. Till this be done, it will be impossible for him to make others understand it. And therefore, the author of the proposed version ought, in my judgment, to be a Clergyman, skilled in the original language, and acquainted with the commentators. And before he attempt any psalm, he will do well to study it, both in the prose translation, and in the Hebrew, so as to have a clear view of the sentiments that he is to versify. Those expressions of severity towards enemies, which the best interpreters consider as prophetic, ought perhaps to be so framed as to assume the form of prophecy; but in this great discretion will be requisite, lest unwarrantable liberties be taken with the sacred text.

Some arrangements of words occur in the Scotch version, which are now hardly tolerable; as when, in order to make out the rhyme, the auxiliary is put after the principal verb. An example or two will explain my meaning, and be a sufficient caution to future versifiers.

He was no foe that me reproach'd,
 Then that *endure I could*;
 Nor hater that did 'gainst me boast,
 From him *me hide I would*. Psal. lv.
 'Tis full of mixture; he pours forth
 And makes the wicked all
 Wring out the bitter dregs thereof;
 Yea, *and they drink them shall*. Ps. lxxv.

I could mention also some very harsh lines, which it is even difficult to articulate ; as,

Thou Tarshish ships with east wind break'st. Ps. xlviii.

—But I will not carry these criticisms any further. It is a disagreeable subject ; and, therefore, I shall only say in general, that all tautology, excessive brevity, obscurity, ambiguity, and every sort of harshness in the sound, in the arrangement, or in the syntax of words, ought carefully to be guarded against on the one hand ; and all mean or familiar allusions, finical ornaments, and common place phraseologies peculiar to the sing-song of modern poetry, on the other. The work should not exhibit the modish air of Tate and Brady, nor the antique guise of Sternhold and Hopkins ; but should have something of the cast of antiquity, tempered with the elegance and smoothness of latter times.

Pope's condemnation of the verb *Do*, as an expletive, is perhaps too general. A poet not inferiour to Pope, either in correctness or in harmony, has used it without blame in a place, where it adds nothing to the sense, and serves only to lengthen the verse and prepare the rhyme ;

The moping owl *does* to the moon complain.

I would not therefore entirely discard *Do* and *Did*, even as expletives ; but they are offensive when frequent.

These lines I *did* to memory commend,

When vanquish'd Thyrsis did in vain contend.

Dryden's Virgil.

This blemish is but too common in our Scotch version of the Psalms. See particularly Psal. xv. 3. and ciii.

3, 4. When they give energy to an expression, which is often the case ; or when they serve to separate two words, which cannot otherwise be separated, and which would form a harsh combination if united, *Do* and *Did* are allowable both in prose and verse, and are sometimes very graceful. In sentences of interrogation they are frequently necessary, and therefore admitted by the best versifiers.

Do morning suns in ruddier glory rise ?

Does evening fan her with serener gales ?

Tears of Old May-day.

The old termination, in *eth*, of the third person singular of English verbs, is also too frequent in our metre psalms ; but, though I would not wish to see it in every page of the proposed version, I will not say that it ought to be every where kept out. By the best English writers of the present time it is generally avoided both in prose and in verse ; and perhaps with reason : for as it never occurs in conversation, it is not quite familiar to our ear, and therefore sounds a little uncouth, except in scripture style, and in other solemn writings that are known to be of considerable antiquity. Some late authors have however adopted it in certain words, from an opinion that it sounds better than the modern termination *S*. But to adopt it in some words, and not in all, makes a style appear both old and new ; and it may deserve attention, that in language, a sound which is uncommon will give greater offence to the ear, than another sound which is more common though less harmonious. Nay, it may be doubted, whether a foreigner would prefer the

sound of *th* to that of the softer *S* or *Z*. Persons who lisp substitute the former for the latter ; but their articulation is not the more musical on that account. Yet it must be allowed, that the old termination, from being constantly used in the English Bible, and other religious writings of the same age, has acquired a peculiar solemnity, and therefore, when the Scripture style is imitated, as in forms of prayer, may be more majestic than the other. But in the versification even of sacred poetry, it has seldom been used of late by any good author, and therefore, though it may be excused, is not to be approved of: partly, because in verse it is uncommon ; and partly, because it may look like a shift to fill up a line, by ekeing out a word with an unnecessary syllable. This effect it often has in our Scotch psalms, as might be proved by many examples. So that if it is to be used at all in the proposed version, it should be used very sparingly.

I come now, Sir, to make a remark or two on the Musick of our Psalmody ; in which I shall be very brief, as I have already taken up too much of your time.

Church-musick, like other outward circumstances relating to Divine Worship, cannot be supposed to possess any intrinsic sanctity ; nor to be useful in any other respect, than as a means of settling and soothing the mind, and infusing devout affections. And it is not to be doubted, that Providence bestowed a sense of harmony on man, for this purpose, among others, that it might assist him in the discharge of religious duty,

both by making him take pleasure in it, and also by enforcing upon him the sentiments of piety and virtue.

That church-musick may answer this end, it is not necessary, that every Christian should join in it. Musicians know, that the hearers of a symphony, or of a song, are often more agreeably affected than the performers. There is something unspeakably delightful in listening to the voices of a choir, or to the song of a congregation: so that the best singer, though at the same time a most devout person, will often, for his own sake, choose to be silent while others sing, that the musick may operate upon his mind with the greater energy.

If this be allowed, and I think no person who knows any thing of musick will deny it, I would earnestly entreat those, who sing very ill, not to sing at all, at least in the church. If they are silent, they may have their affections raised by the singing of others: but if they sing, especially if they sing loud (which bad singers seldom fail to do) they will not hear the congregation, and they must disturb every person in the neighbourhood of their pew, who has a musical ear. It is a hard case, in performing an act of devotion, to have one's senses confounded, and one's thoughts discomposed, by those unmerciful bawlers, a few of whom are to be met with in almost every country parish, and whose roarings are generally loud in proportion as they are untuneable.

Let me also recommend it to those who join in the publick psalmody, to sing softly. This will give both mellowness and exactness to the musick. For in most

human voices, when much exerted, especially those of women and boys, there is a tendency to fall below the key : which in a church is frequently productive of intolerable dissonance. But all psalms should not be sung with the same exertion. Repentance and sorrow are most emphatically expressed in a low voice, and pious thanksgiving in a tone that is neither too low nor too loud ; while psalms of rejoicing and triumph demand a bolder strain. Where they sing in full chorus, the bass should be sounded more forcibly, and the treble more faintly, than the other parts ; the counter-tenor, which adds wonderful grace to the harmony, requires a sweet and delicate utterance, just loud enough to be heard through the church, and no louder. The tenor, or church-part, as it is called, must be sung by men and women indifferently ; because there will always be, in every congregation, a great number of both sexes, who can sing no other part. The treble, or highest part, belongs to women and boys ; for their voices are to the voice of a man what the violin is to the violoncello : the counter-tenor should be left to such men as have a voice that is sweet and clear, and capable of rising to a high pitch. Counter-tenor voices are not often met with ; but two or three may be found in every parish ; and two or three are sufficient to compleat the harmony in any well-tuned congregation. The parts thus adjusted would have a charming effect. But so little regard is paid to propriety in these matters, that, in one church, I have heard a multitude of boys employed on the bass ; and, in another, a great number of women singing the

counter-tenor in so shrill a tone, as to overpower all the other voices of the assembly. Before arrangements of this kind are made, it would not be unworthy of a kirk-session, to take the advice of those who understand the theory of musick.

Different rules have been laid down, for ascertaining the *time* of psalm-tunes. As I hold a distinct articulation of the words to be essential to good singing, I would say, that psalms should be sung in such a manner, as that they who are hearers may understand the words pronounced by the singers. Were this rule observed, that excessive drawling would be avoided, which tends rather to stupify than to elevate the mind; and pious sentiments and harmonious sounds would mutually enliven and recommend each other. Yet some psalms would seem to require a quicker, and some a slower movement. And here, in regard to quickness, I might repeat the rule which I formerly proposed in regard to loudness; for the same affections quicken the motion, that elevate the voice.

Every good performer employs a variety of graces, especially in slow musick, for preparing and connecting his notes, and giving them expression. But great knowledge of the art, both in practice and in theory, is necessary to qualify him for this; and it is better to give no graces at all, than to throw them in unskilfully. To be able to apply them with address in singing, one must both understand musick, and also have great flexibility of voice. But these are talents which can never become universal among man-

kind; and therefore, the common people should be taught to sing the psalm-tunes as they are set, and without graces. This may sound a little awkward in a single song; but in a full chorus it is not so observable. At any rate, and at all times, it will give less offence, than graces and quaverings unskilfully introduced.

I wonder, whence Presbyterians have got the custom of sitting while the psalms are sung. In this posture one cannot sing freely, or with the full command of one's voice. The very act of rising up, in company with a great multitude, gives an impulse to the soul, and prepares it for a new exertion. Besides, if there be any thing peculiarly decent in sitting while we praise God, I would fain know, why the precentors or clerks are obliged to stand.

I wish they were also obliged to put on a serious air, while they are thus employed. Many of them do so; and have a right sense of those decorums that belong to an act of worship. But some affect the appearance of total inattention; and, while they sing, cast their eyes to every corner of the church, and turn their head at every opening of the door; as if they meant to satisfy the audience, that they could keep the tune without once thinking of what they were about.

The practice in Scotland, of reading each line of the psalm separate, and then singing it, was introduced, as I have been told, when it was in some sort necessary; that is, when a great number of people in every congregation could not read. That is not the case now; and therefore the practice should be discontinued. And

I humbly think, that the minister should always read over, in a distinct voice, that part of the psalm which is to be sung ; and if he were to explain any difficult phrase that may occur in it, I believe his people would think themselves obliged to him. This indeed is done in many places : but, in some country parishes, the morning psalms are begun before the minister enters the church ; and of the other psalms he never reads more than the first line ; which cannot fail to lessen the veneration of the people for that part of worship.

The reasonableness of using Instrumental Musick in churches might be proved, from Scripture ; from the general practice of Christians ; from the constitution of the human mind ; and from the very nature of the human voice, and of musical sound. But I need not enter upon the proof ; as, in this country at least, the practice can never become universal. For though the *Assembly* were to authorise it, I doubt whether there are sixty parishes in Scotland, that could afford the expence of an organ, and an organist. The best things however may be abused ; and the lovers of that instrument may draw comfort from this consideration, that, if we enjoy not the benefit of organ-musick, we are not hurt by its improprieties ; which, as that matter is too frequently conducted, are neither few nor small.

I cannot conclude, Sir, without returning you my best thanks for the pleasure and instruction I have reaped from your excellent Sermons. The reception this *first volume* (as I flatter myself it will soon be

called) has met with from the publick, does honour to the piety and taste of the age ; and will, it is to be hoped, prevail with you to give us many other such volumes ; which they who have the happiness to be your hearers know you can do with very little trouble.

I am, with great esteem and respect,

REVEREND SIR,

Your most faithful, humble servant.

May 31. }
1778. }

[The preceding Letter is reprinted *verbatim* from a copy (*penes* R. B.) printed in 1778, but never published. It is singular that it was not known to SIR WILLIAM FORBES, the Biographer of Dr Beattie. The reader may consult Letters CXV. and CXXV. in Sir William Forbes' Account of the Life and Writings of the Doctor ; also the *note* relative to Mr Cameron, appended to Letter CII.]

W. Aitken, Printer,
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